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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0027
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UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000412

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: GOTX ALLOWS WRITER ESENOV TO DEPART TURKMENISTAN
TO RECEIVE PEN AWARD

REF: ASHGABAT 386

11. (SBU) Summary: Despite FM Meredov's confirmation to OSCE Ashgabat Ambassador Ibrahim Djikic on April 14 that PEN Club award winner, writer Rahim Esenov, would not be permitted to travel due to two convictions (reftel), Esenov and his daughter Maya departed the morning of April 17 for New York to receive the award at the PEN Gala. While Mr. Esenov's departure may indicate a communication failure between GOTX ministries, post believes that it is equally likely that it represents a true victory for western diplomacy in the quest to promote human rights and freedom of expression. End summary.

12. (SBU) When Embassy officers told Esenov of FM Meredov's discussion of charges, Esenov was surprised, contending that his only act involving "contraband" was commercial: he had made a commercial contract with a driver to carry books from Moscow to Ashgabat. He also noted that the GOTX had unfairly decided to punish his son-in-law for the "crimes" by banning him from leaving the country for five years.

13. (SBU) OSCE Human Dimensions Officer Benjamin Moreau, who facilitated OSCE's financial support for the ticket of Mr. Esenov, expressed concern that Mr. Esenov would not travel to the airport given the charges, but Esenov confirmed he would go. Because FM Meredov had so firmly stressed to Ambassador Djikic that Esenov would not be permitted to travel, Djikic decided it was not necessary for Moreau to accompany Esenov to the airport. Ambassador Jacobson also decided that PAO vice the DCM should accompany the Esenovs so as to lower the USG profile in this sensitive case.

14. (SBU) PAO and IRC Assistant--who had filmed Esenov so that PEN would be able to show a video in the event Esenov was not able to travel--met with Mr. Rahim Esenov, his daughter Maya and her family at the airport on April 16 for check-in at the Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt, connecting to New York. PAO informed PEN administrative officer by e-mail that both Esenov and his daughter

appeared to have departed.

¶5. (SBU) Maya Esenova's family informed embassy staff by phone the following morning that they assumed both had departed. DCM--who had facilitated the ticket of Esenova--called Lufthansa the next morning to inquire whether Esenov and his daughter were on the manifest; the Lufthansa official called back later and could tell the DCM only "don't worry" --which she understood as code for "they departed." But it was not until PEN informed SCA deskoff by phone of the Esenovs' arrival in JFK that post was able to confirm they had departed.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Post believes that Mr. Esenov's departure was either due to GOTX internal miscommunication or to their decision that his departure would ultimately benefit GOTX more than preventing him from departing - an argument the DCM had stressed to the MFA in early April. GOTX's decision simply may not have been transmitted to the airport immigration officers, indicating loopholes in the bureaucracy. However, we believe that Esenov's departure may well represent a victory for western diplomacy in the quest to promote freedom of expression. His departure was the result of intense efforts of U.S. embassy staff, coordinating with PEN Center, Washington, and OSCE and UK diplomats in Ashgabat, for many weeks, who can savor a far too seldom but deep satisfaction in their contributions to such an historic event.